**STEM Wizard Update Discovery Research Discussion Guide**

**Introduction**

Thanks for joining us today! My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I also have two colleagues on the line, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. They’ll be taking notes to ensure that we capture your feedback accurately.

We are interested in speaking with you today because the VA would like to understand more about how military-connected students learn about educational benefits.

As part of this research, the VA is interested in understanding how students:

* determine their eligibility for educational benefits, and
* modify their existing benefits.

This week, we are talking with military-connected students in sessions like this to gather feedback on the process of applying for a specific educational benefit.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Can you see our screen in the WebEx?

**Recording**

We generally record our sessions, in case we need to confirm that we’ve captured people’s opinions accurately

* Are you comfortable if I record the audio and screen movements as we talk today?
* Great, I’m going to go ahead and start the recording.
* Once it’s on, I’ll ask you if it’s okay one more time, as we like to have your verbal consent.
* [Only if we use our WebEx] There will be a slight pause, then we’ll hear an announcement that the recording has started.

[Start recording] Are you comfortable if I record the audio as we talk today?

Thank you. Let’s start with a few questions about your degree program.

**Educational background**

1. How did you go about applying for educational benefits? (paper form, online, worked with SCO, etc) [A bit beyond our scope, however it may help us understand their comfort level with online forms]

P2: I used, the first time, I used the paper form, but after that I used the online form.

T: did that on your own?

P: I did that on my own.

1. What type of degree are you pursuing? I’m getting a bachelor’s in science, in biochemistry.
2. How far through the program are you? I will be graduating this May.
3. Approximately how many months or years of educational benefit do you have remaining? I do not have a lot. I’m actually using the scholarship.

T: the stem scholarship?

P: yeah.

T: when did you apply for that?

P: I applied in December. I got approved.

T: how do you think the process went?

P: it went very smooth, very smooth.

T: how did you find out about it?

P: online. On facebook, I follow, the gi bill, they have a page. I’ve been following it for years now, and every update they have I see it.

T: fantastic. You’re the first person we’ve talked to who’s heard of it and applied for it and received it. When you applied, did you use the online form?

P: I did, yes.

1. [If STEM] Do you have any interest in obtaining a teaching certification after you graduate?

**Set the stage**

[Bring up the Wizard on one of the following pages:

* <https://www.va.gov/education/eligibility/>
* [https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/]](https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/%5D)

[ Participants may be less inclined to wonder aimlessly if we start on the eligibility page.  
Give the user context on the page we'll be reviewing, then focus in on the section of interest. ]

Let's look at the "How do I apply" section of this page.

Take a moment to read the 2 sentences above the green button and read the title of the green button.

[T passed her control]

**Questions**

1. What would you expect to happen when you click the green "Find your education benefits form" button?

P: When I click find your education benefit? Different options will come up about my benefit.

1. Feel free to click the button. What are your thoughts on this question?
2. What would you expect to happen if you clicked each of the 3 radio buttons?

P: For the first one, if you already have the benefit and you want a new one. For the second one, if you want to change something about the current benefit that you’re using. For the third one, applying for the stem program scholarship.

T: it’s interesting because you already have the scholarship. When you first heard about it, did you first have an impression about who’d be eligible for it or how you’d apply?

P: People that are majoring in stem programs.

T: any thoughts about the eligibility?

P: Sure. I knew that it would be people majoring, but I didn’t think that your program had to be a bachelors of science only.

T: are you speaking just the typical science, the b.s. degree?

P: I thought if you were doing the first year in science, an associate’s in science, you could do it. But I come to find out it has to be a bachelors.

T: any other areas you could take the program in?

P: I know that it’s just science. The only thing I didn’t know is that it has to be a bachelor’s. Anything under a bachelor’s you don’t qualify for it

T: what about whether or not you’ve already applied for a gi bill and are using a gi bill?

P: I know your gi bill has to be done for you to be able to use it. I know your gi bill has to be done for you to be able to use your scholarship.

T: any thoughts about how it would be most useful for people to gather that information?

P: maybe the universities can let the students know that there’s this thing out there. I know a lot of people that didn’t know about it. I told them about it. They were shocked and had never heard of it. So maybe the schools can let the veterans know that are using their gi bill know about it.

T: anything we can do online to give people additional information?

P: if you do have a Facebook, you would definitely know. Other than that, if you’re not following the GI bill pages online, I don’t think there’s any other way online you’d find out about it.

T: do you think people looking about this are automatically going to know the details about how much money you’re going to get, the eligibility requirements would be?

P: Unless you’re a STEM major, you don’t know what STEM is. No, I don’t think people would just look at it and just know what it is, no.

T: do you think we should just have people go off and have people look at other pages or have more information here?

P: no, maybe because I already did it, it’s pretty self-explanatory. It’s not hard to figure out.

T: let me show you one other quick thing. [navigated to stem form page] so this is a question asking for the people wanting to apply for the scholarship I want to get your thoughts about the section at the bottom [helper text]

P: what the question is? It probably is explaining what the scholarship is and probably who’s eligible for the scholarship.

T: Yes, exactly. So this is something we’re thinking of putting on the first page to give people more information about it. I’m going to go ahead and open it. [T opened helper link]

P: It explains it really well that it’s for students that are majoring in…yeah that’s really good. It explains the amount that you can get, the maximum, how many months you can get, so it’s really good.

C: [asked about facebook gi bill page and if it’s va-endorsed]

P: I think it’s va-endorsed because, yeah, I think it is. Yeah, I think so. I’m not really sure, but I really do believe it is.

A: Since you have gone through the stem scholarship application recently, I was curious what you recall about going through that process and submitting the application online.

P: it was really fast and it was really easy. I didn’t have to download anything. It was a really easy process.

A: were you logged in or did you submit without being logged in?

P: I was logged in. I used ebenefits, so yea, I was logged in.

A: When you were going through the process, what were your thoughts about that? Did you know this is it, the whole thing? Did you wonder if there were other questions you’re not getting?

P: I got it from the first time. It was really easy. I got it from the first time. I knew exactly what it was.

A: any other friends doing the stem scholarship?

P: I have a classmate who has two months left, but I told him about it and he will be using it.

A: he already applied for it?

P: No, it has to be completely done for you to be able to apply.

A: you might want to have him double check that because I know you have to be within 6 months of exhausting your benefit.

P: I told him you have to be completely done, but I’ll let him know.

A: that’ll be helpful. Then you won’t have to be worried at the end when you’re going into finals.

P: I had no idea. I applied when mine was completely done. I told him that because I waited, so I thought you’d have to be done completely.

A: in the gi bill facebook group, did you do any other research about it, anything on va.gov or did you click on that link right away and apply for it?

P: as I said, in facebook, I did go online and I looked it up. Even in facebook, I asked questions so I did look it up.

A: when you were asking questions, who was responding to those?

P: the person running the page.

A: did anyone who wasn’t the admin… was there chatter about it? Were you the only interested one?

P: a lot of people were interested about it, a lot were asking questions, a lot of non-stem. That’s why I said that some might not understand what stem is.

A: we were talking to someone earlier who was asking all kinds of questions so it’s interesting talking to an array of people about it.

P: Most people don’t know what stem is. You have to be a stem major to know, to really understand what it is.

A: thanks. I really appreciate you taking the time to make this happen today.

P: You’re welcome. I just want to say thank you for the scholarship. It means so much to my family because I was going to use loans, but now I don’t have to so thank you so much for whoever came up with this. Thank you!

a. Let's explore the radio button options… Could you talk me through what you think “Apply for new benefit” means?

b. What about “Update my current benefits”?

c. What does “Applying to extend my benefit using the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship” mean to you?  
[We'll use this question to determine if they’re familiar with “STEM” as an acronym… If they don’t mention “STEM – for science, technology, engineering & math”, ask “What fields of study do you think the scholarship might be focused on?”]

1. What, if anything, have you heard about the STEM Scholarship?

a. [If they've heard of it] Where did hear that?

b. [If they haven’t heard of the STEM Scholarship] What do you think the STEM scholarship might be?

1. What are your thoughts on who might be eligible for the STEM scholarship?
2. Given the information you have now, how likely would you be to apply for the STEM scholarship?(Consider probing around their thought process for applying or not when they’re not sure if they’d be eligible.)
3. If you wanted to learn more about the STEM scholarship and who might be eligible for it, how would you go about doing that? (allow them to explore the site, if relevant)
4. If you were actually applying for education benefits, what additional information would help you know which option you’d want to choose here?
5. [If on the Eligibility page] What would you expect to happen if you clicked the "Learn more about how to apply for educational benefits" link?

Looks like we have 5-10 minutes left, so I want to pause and give my colleagues on the phone an opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

[Additional questions from any observers on the phone]

Do you have any questions for us?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. We very much appreciate your willingness to be part of our process. The insights you shared are very valuable and will help us ensure that future students have all of the information they need to take full advantage of VA educational benefits.

At the beginning, you mentioned you saw a gi bill website and that’s where you learned about the stem scholarship.