**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]

P: I did it in paper, like at the actual va office at the school, but they said they couldn’t accept it there at the school, so I was denied the benefits.

T: and that was the gi bill benefits or some other sort?

P: Right, the gi bill.

T: that was the first and only time you attempted?

P: Right. I have never…

T: do you remember which type? Was it 9/11 or Montgomery?

P: the Montgomery.

T: Oh ok. Approximately how long ago was this?

P: Probably 2002.

T: the form we’re looking for does relate with 9/11. Are you interested in walking through it and seeing what would help other veterans??

P: Sure.

T: alright.

1. What type of degree are you pursuing?
2. How far through the program are you?
3. Approximately how many months or years of educational benefit do you have remaining?
4. [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.

**Questions**

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

P: It’s probably just to, opens up the next page, probably, the how to apply, or the application maybe.

[T passed control to him]

P: Do you want me to click the button?

1. Feel free to click the button. What are your thoughts on this question?

P: apply for new benefit or update your current education benefit, I guess.

T: well, what we’re doing is we’re curious about your thoughts on each of the 3 of these. What you think they might mean. What people would think, essentially.

P: I guess the first one would be for someone applying to school would be new benefit. The second one would be somebody who’s enrolled in school. The other one, I guess it would be to apply for something specific, for the third one.

T: Right. Very good. The one we’re curious to hear people’s thoughts on is the last one. What do you think this is that people would be applying for, the edith nourse rogers stem scholarship. Any thoughts on what that one might be?

P: Not really. Maybe some sort of grant thing? Maybe additional benefits for school?

T: Ok, yeah. Do you think STEM is a word that people might recognize or is that a word that’s a little too cryptic?

P: Yeah, the only thing that comes to mind is stem cell research or things like that. I’m not too sure exactly what that one is.

T: Alright. One of our main reasons for doing this testing is to understand what we might need to put on this page to help people understand what that is or to give people a definition of what that is, some ore information because it doesn’t have a lot to go on. We’re trying to find out what questions people might have. Can you think of any questions you might have about that last radio button?

P: They probably already know what it means if they’re extending their benefit for it, so. I guess, yeah. That’s about it.

T: If we were to provide some extra information, where would you want to see it?

P: Maybe right below or next to it or something would probably be the best spot.

T: Ok. Do you think we would want to show it all the time or just for people that are curious?

P: Maybe just for people that are curious. If they’re applying to extend the benefit, they probably already know what it is.

T: A, C, any questions?

C: what kind of information about stem do you think would be helpful to have here?

P: Maybe just what type of program or something. I’m not sure because I don’t know what it is myself, but extending benefits, if it’s somebody coming in to reapply for benefits, they’d probably know. I don’t think there would need to be too much additional explanation.

C: Ok, and if you were coming through, do you think you would try to select that third option and apply for it?

P: probably not because I know I’m not using any education benefits right now. I know I would be applying for new benefits. If I was in school, I would be updating current benefits. I don’t know if that’s a certain program that’s available to like, for students, maybe. I don’t know.

T: one of the things we’re doing is try to explain that stem acronym. We thought we might try to put some additional information here to let people know that it stands for science, technology, engineering and math. We could put that either below it or beside it so that’s a good idea.

C: where would you hope to learn about education benefits?

P: where? Online like this. I’m not sure. I guess a typical webpage like this would be a typical spot. I was just going to say financial aid, through the school would be a spot to learn about it too.

A: if you were, hypothetically, if you wanted to learn more about the stem scholarship, how would you go about doing that?

P: I guess just googling it most of the time is where we get most of our information these days.

A: if you had a couple of different options in your search results, which link would you be more likely to click on?

P: like these 3 links here?

A: nah, if you googled the stem scholarship and you were looking at the search results.

P: I would start at the top and work my way down and find the information that I need, even call somebody through the school. Like financial aid, I feel like they should know about that type of thing. If it’s offered through the school, the financial aid advisors would be able to tell me about it, too.

A: ok, that lets us know that the schools need to be well-versed in the scholarships.

P: when I applied for my financial aid years ago, they had the whole gi bill. They knew their whole way through that program. I didn’t know much about it.

A: you didn’t end up using much of your gi bill benefits?

P: yeah, I went to a, it was a culinary school, it was a technical program. I guess they don’t take that. They didn’t take it. I don’t remember what it was.

C: you haven’t tried using them again, your benefits?

P: no, not recently. I’ve actually been thinking about going back to school myself. Just got a lot of life going on. Not really sure.

C: There’s also vocational rehab that you might want to look into.

A: for sure if you’re considering further education, there’s the post 9/11 if you would be eligible for it. There’s even a new program called vet tec where you can go for shorter certification training and it doesn’t count against your benefit. If you just go to va.gov and then go to education and training.

C: it’s fairly new but there’s a lot of good information in it.

A: if you’re going back to school, there’s a lot of good information in there.

T: any other questions.

P: no, I don’t think so…

1. What would you expect to happen if you clicked each of the 3 radio buttons?

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.