**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: Yes, I’m actively using them right now.

1. What type of degree are you pursuing?

P: I’m getting my masters in cyber from Brown University.

1. How far through the program are you?
2. Approximately how many months or years of educational benefit do you have remaining?

P: No, I don’t have that sheet of paper. I know I have at least another year and a half of eligibility.

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.

**Questions**

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

P: I would assume that, as I look at this, would I have already been signed in?

T: it could be either way.

P: On the previous site, you’d go through all these series of forms, and you’d have to sign in. I would make sure I was signed in first. Here, I’d look to see, hopefully, my information would be there and it would know what benefits I’m eligible for. Could I drive, could I click this or no? [he pressed button]

T: Yes, we’re curious to know. This is the main area we want to talk about today. We’re curious about your thoughts on this question.

P: Right here, I’d want to know up front what I’m eligible for. I may not know if I’m eligible for Post 9/11, MGI bill, all the different benefits and programs I’d be eligible for, all the programs that are out there. Remember, all the different programs have criteria.

T: Let’s assume you’re eligible for 9/11. Talk to me about those three buttons and what you think they would mean.

P: For the first one, apply for new benefits, I’m applying for a program. Second one, updating my current education benefits, I don’t know what you’d update, honestly. Why would you update your current education benefits? Why would I be updating my current education benefits? Either you’re eligible for them or you’re not. I like the third one, extending it, and it’s based on a scholarship.

T: Have you heard of that one?

P: No, I have not.

T: What do you think extending one’s benefits would mean?

P: For me, there’s some recent legislation passed that I believe President Trump signed extending gi bill benefits past the original amount. That’s something every Veteran is interested in. How does that ruling affect my current benefit? Because I don’t even know how it affects mine.

T: Ok. Yeah, because you’re talking about the Forever gi bill, correct?

P: yeah.

T: lets say someone’s wondered about the stem scholarship. How would you find out more about it?

P: I’d highlight edith nourse rogers stem scholarship and I”d open up a new window and google search it. It would be helpful to me if that was a hyperlink.

T: where do you think it would take you?

P: Hopefully to the information about that scholarship.

T: on google or elsewhere?

P: I’d definitely want to stay within my current site. I’d definitely want to stay within the VA.

T: that makes a lot of sense. So you’d be comfortable clicking on that and gong to another portion of the va website, learning about it and coming back to this?

P: and another thing a lot of sites don’t do that well is it could bring you back to where you were. When you look at something, ok, I got it and now let me go back to where I was. If there was like a back button there. If, at the top of the screen, there’s almost like a a button that could say, “where you were”.

T: any additional information we could put on this page to give people more information for them to understand whether it’s worth it?

P: maybe like a mouseover. When you mouseover it, information would come down. Like what that is, information on what you’d be eligible for. It would be a waste of my time if, hey, I want to apply for that, but I’m not eligible for it.

T: so now a question you might have is “would I be eligible for it”?

P: Yes, would I be eligible for the edith nourse rogers stem scholarship, knowing that I’m in a cybersecurity program? Is that something that’s applicable to me?

T: so you’re talking about topics, areas of study?

P: yes.

T: ok. Part of our research is figuring out what questions people wonder.

P: the other thing is updating my current education benefit. I’m curious about the thought process behind that question. When you come on the site, you’d want to find out about your benefit or apply for a benefit. How could I update it, why would I update my benefit?

T: we’ve heard a couple of questions about that. What it allows you to do is change to a different school, you’re letting the va know that you’re changing schools or changing your major, that sort of thing, maybe there could be different ways that could be phrased.

P: you bring up an interesting point. My last two experiences with the VA office at the schools have been unbelievably good. American university and Brown, their va coordinators are unbelievable. They’re just really good. I have a friend who’s going through UMC Chapel Hill and he’s not having that experience. He’s really frustrated and he’s calling me all the time. I hooked him up with an American university guy who’s helping him through the process. He’s having issues applying for his benefits. I know that’s a rabbit hole, sorry.

T: no, that’s interesting. So, we’re looking at that last radio button, and understanding some questions you might have.

P: what is it?

T: what is it? what do you get? Any other questions you might think of?

P: No.

T: Ok, I’m going to show you another page. When one clicks on this, you have the ability to apply. As they go through that process, you mentioned a while ago that it was a series of questions. Step 2 of 6 is a question about the stem scholarship again for someone who’s attempting to apply for it. I want to get your thoughts on this area down here.

P: I just think, for me, what is the stem scholarship? You could go further back. Knowing, if it was something that I wanted, I would apply for it. I’d click yes. Hopefully knowing I’m eligible for it.

T: how hard would you try to find out your eligibility for it before clicking this and attempting to?

P: I’m not a big fan of applying for things I’m not eligible for, so it’s like a no beforehand. I would take a fair amount of time and think hey, am I even eligible for this scholarship? Knowing that this is through the va, if you’re pulling va benefits, you’re not authorized to receive any other scholarships. That’s something ensuring there’s no…when I was at American, they offered scholarships, but I was not eligible. Va said I would lose my gi bill if I took a scholarship from American.

T: is that something we would want to reassure people of?

P: yes. I’m making the assumption because this is through the va there won’t be a conflict. The last thing we want to do is lose our benefits because we applied for and took a different scholarship.

T: right. Good point. Alright, so from this page, how would you learn more about this scholarship?

P: from here, I’d click on it [helper link] and read more about it.

T: ok, we’ll go ahead and do that [T clicked link in helper text]

P: So right here, this is an undergraduate program. I like it.

T: does this answer a lot of the questions you came up with earlier?

P: for me it would answer them. I would not be qualified for it because I’m a graduate.

T: if you were choosing an undergraduate program, would you have any other questions?

P: I think it’s straightforward. IT tells you exactly what it is, up to a maximum of 30,000. Straightforward. I’m curious why you might say “may qualify”. That term brings into question what do you mean “may”? Why would I not qualify for it?

T: Good point. very good. Do you have any questions so far about what you’ve seen on these pages?

P: no, it’s straightforward. I’m going to ask A and C if they have any questions for you.

A: when you originally applied for your education benefits, how did you go about doing that? Did you do it online, submit a paper form, work with someone?

P: this was back when the information available **[cont]**

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?

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.