

Research Readout

GIBCT: Estimate Your Benefits



VA.gov

5.21.20



What We Wanted to Learn
What We Did
What We Learned
Appendix

What We Wanted to Learn

The Problem | The Product | Why This Testing

The Problem

GI Bill Comparison Tool users who are estimating benefits, especially those with accessibility challenges or those on mobile devices, may not detect the changes they're making to the estimated benefits on Profile Pages because those changes could be happening outside their field of view.

How might we improve the experience for these users to ensure they can detect changes they've made to their estimated benefits on profile pages?

The Comparison Tool will include new functionality to initiate benefit updates and improve the users' awareness of their actions and the resulting updates.

Why This Testing?

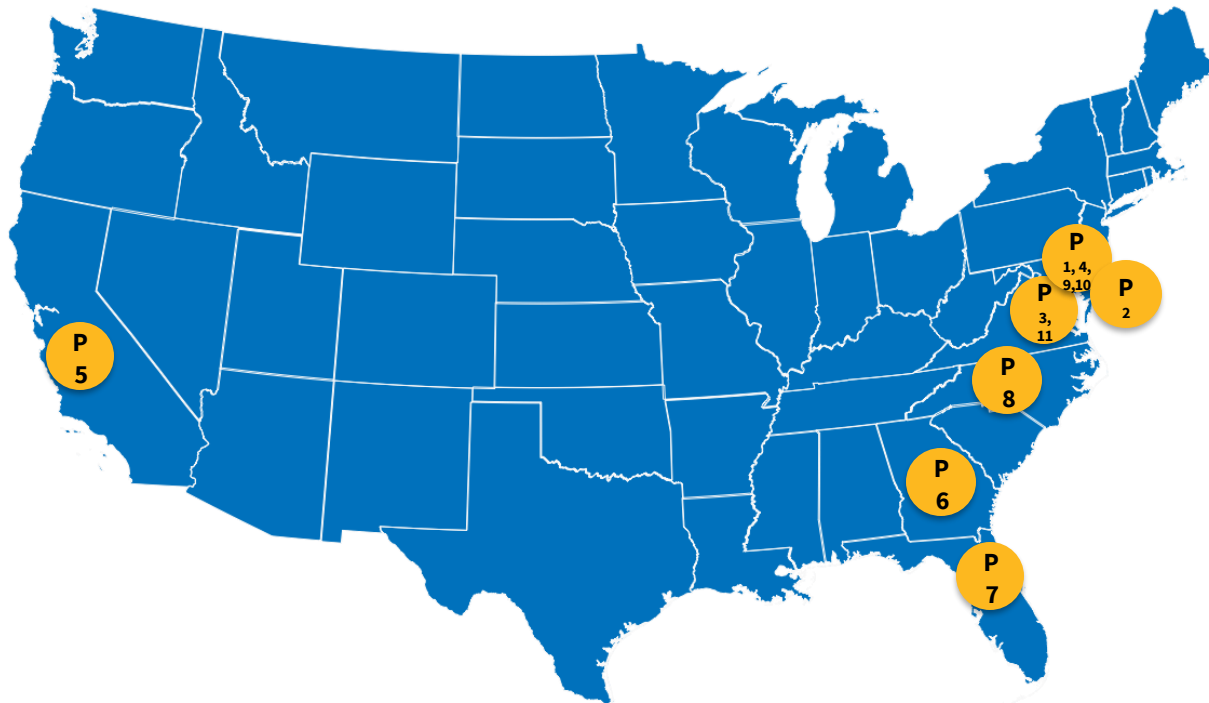
We want to ensure Comparison Tool users understand the new controls and can observe the changes they initiate.

We also want to identify issues users on mobile devices and those using assistive technologies might have that aren't obvious to non-native users of those technologies.

What We Did

Participants | Research Methods

Participants



4 Women
7 Men

11
Veterans

3
Branches

4
Ethnic
Backgrounds

25-64
Age Range

Research Methods

The screenshot shows the VA website's 'Education and training' section. It features a profile for the University of California-Berkeley, including its location, website, and program details. Below this is a 'Your estimated benefits' calculator. The calculator uses the following inputs: 'Veteran' for military status, 'Post-9/11 GI Bill (Ch 33)' for the benefit type, and '36+ months: 100% (includes BASIC)' for cumulative service. The results show a total benefit of \$32,806 per year, which includes \$12,972 for tuition and fees, \$3,534 for housing allowance, and \$1,000 for a book stipend. The calculator also shows estimated benefits per term for tuition and fees and housing allowance.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY

518 GI Bill students ([Learn more](#))

BERKELEY, CA
<http://www.berkeley.edu>
4 year program

Public school
City locale
Large size

Estimate your benefits

Use the fields below to calculate your benefits:

Your benefits

What's your military status?
Veteran

Which GI Bill benefit do you want to use? ([Learn more](#))
Post-9/11 GI Bill (Ch 33)

Cumulative Post-9/11 active-duty service ([Learn more](#))
36+ months: 100% (includes BASIC)

Did you use your Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for tuition, housing, or books for a term that started before January 1, 2018? ([Learn more](#))
☐ Yes
☒ No

About your school

Learning format and schedule

Scholarships and other funding

Your estimated benefits

GI Bill pays to school: \$12,972/yr
Tuition and fees charged: \$12,972
Out of pocket tuition: \$0

Housing allowance: \$3,534/mo

Book stipend: \$1,000/yr

Total paid to you: \$32,806

Estimated benefits per term

Tuition and fees ([Learn more](#))

Fall: \$6,486
Spring: \$6,486
Total per year: \$12,972

Housing allowance ([Learn more](#))

Fall: \$15,903
Spring: \$15,903
Total per year: \$31,806

The following research methods were used:

Remote Usability Sessions on staging site with Veterans who:

- Are using or are planning to use VA education benefits in the next 6 months
- Use mobile for web browsing
- Use assistive technology

What We Learned

Primary Finding

Most Veterans can calculate
their benefits using the new
Estimate Your Benefits controls
across all institution types

"I like it as far as breaking it out for me and explaining it. ... I like it. Everything is right in front of you."

- P6

"I think this is easy for anyone young or old. This is self-explanatory."

- P7

Finding 1

Users seemed more likely to engage with the controls within accordions than in the previous version of the profile page

The screenshot shows the VA's official website with the "GI Bill® Comparison Tool" for the University of California-Berkeley. The page includes a header with the VA logo, navigation links, and a search bar. The main content area displays school details for UC Berkeley, including its location, website, and program type. A section titled "Estimate your benefits" contains a form with dropdown menus for military status (Veteran), GI Bill benefit (Post-9/11 GI Bill), and service length (36+ months). Below the form, there are three expandable accordions: "About your school", "Learning format and schedule", and "Scholarships and other funding". To the right of the form, a table titled "Your estimated benefits" shows the following data:

Your estimated benefits	
GI Bill pays to school:	\$12,972/yr
Tuition and fees charged:	\$12,972
Out of pocket tuition:	\$0
Housing allowance:	\$3,534/mo
Book stipend:	\$1,000/yr
Total paid to you:	\$32,806

Below this table, another section titled "Estimated benefits per term" provides a breakdown of costs and allowances for each semester and the total per year.

Estimated benefits per term	
Tuition and fees (Learn more)	
Fall:	\$6,486
Spring:	\$6,486
Total per year:	\$12,972
Housing allowance (Learn more)	
Fall:	\$15,903
Spring:	\$15,903
Total per year:	\$31,806

- Based on observations from previous test sessions, we noticed participants were more curious about and likely to click into the controls without prompting

“I think the categories make it easy for everyone so they don’t have to go searching very far.”

- P4

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Proceed with multiple accordion approach. Update, as necessary, to make them more useful and usable

Finding 2

Some accordion labels caused confusion

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY

518 GI Bill students ([Learn more](#))

BERKELEY, CA Public school
<http://www.berkeley.edu> City locale
4 year program Large size

Estimate your benefits

Use the fields below to calculate your benefits:

Your benefits —

What's your military status?
Veteran

Which GI Bill benefit do you want to use? ([Learn more](#))
Post-9/11 GI Bill (Ch 33)

Cumulative Post-9/11 active-duty service ([Learn more](#))
36+ months: 100% (includes BASIC)

Did you use your Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for tuition, housing, or books for a term that started before January 1, 2018? ([Learn more](#))
☐ Yes
☒ No

About your school +
Learning format and schedule +
Scholarships and other funding +

Additional resources

- [Get started with CareerScope](#)
- [Get help choosing a school](#)
- [Submit a complaint through our Feedback System](#)
- [Apply for education benefits](#)

Your estimated benefits

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- Participants mentioned the contents of some accordions didn't match their expectations based on the labels
- Participants mentioned "Your benefits" controls were really Veteran's status or personal information
- Participants thought "About your school" would contain general information about the institution

“I thought “About your school” would contain information about demographics, basic historical information, size of student body, graduation rate, 5-year salary outside school.”

- P2

“‘Your benefits’ is what's on the right side of the page.”

- P6

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Modify accordion label copy so Veterans have a clearer understanding of what each group contains. Target “Your benefits” and “About your school”, in particular

Finding 3

Most users understood that modifications on the left side of the page updated the benefits panel on the right side

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518 GI Bill students ([Learn more](#))

BERKELEY, CA Public school
<http://www.berkeley.edu> City locale
4 year program Large size

Estimate your benefits

Use the fields below to calculate your benefits:

Your benefits +
About your school -

Are you an in-state student?
☒ Yes
☐ No

Tuition and fees per year ([Learn more](#))
\$12,972

School Calendar ([Learn more](#))
Semesters

Enrolled ([Learn more](#))
Full Time

Learning format and schedule +
Scholarships and other funding +

Calculate benefits

Additional resources
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[Get help choosing a school](#)
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Your estimated benefits

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Total per year:	\$31,806
Book stipend (Learn more)	

- Most participants anticipated that the adjustments on the left operated the benefits on the right
- Some participants found it challenging to see what exactly had changed within the benefits panel
- One participant mentioned that the benefits already had been calculated... he was “updating” them

"I'd assume the "Calculate benefits" button marries up [the input] selection and the grey box."

- P11

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Modify the button label to “Update benefits” to more accurately reflect the control
- Continue to explore mechanisms to display updates more prominently

Finding 4

Some participants didn't see - and didn't initially use - the calculate button as they tried to customize their estimates

- Participants on mobile and using assistive tech couldn't see the "Calculate benefits" button and wondered what was supposed to happen as they tried to customize their estimates
- Several participants toggled back and forth between accordions to see if their changes held as they updated selections but didn't click "Calculate benefits"

"Did you use your Post-9/11 tuition before January 1? So I clicked yes [but didn't see a change]."

Participant scrolled down until the
"Calculate benefits" button appeared:

"Ah!"

- P8

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Add "Update benefits" button to each of the accordions so that visibility is not an issue; this will also benefit those using mobile, screen magnifiers or zoom functionality on their internet browser
- Disable "Update benefits" button until a change has been made within the relevant accordion

Finding 5

All participants were able to successfully identify benefits for VET TEC programs

System

Approved programs

The following training programs are approved for VET TEC:

Program name	Length	Tuition & Fees
✓ GALVANIZE DATA SCIENCE IMMERSIVE	480 hours	\$17,980
HACK REACTOR SOFTWARE ENGINEERING	576 hours	TBD
HACK REACTOR SOFTWARE ENGINEERING ONLINE	576 hours	TBD

Estimate your benefits

Use the fields below to calculate your benefits

Choose the training program you'd like to attend

☒ GALVANIZE DATA SCIENCE IMMERSIVE

☐ HACK REACTOR SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

☐ HACK REACTOR SOFTWARE ENGINEERING ONLINE

Tuition and fees for program ([Learn more](#))

\$17,980

Scholarships (excluding Pell) ([Learn more](#))

\$0

[Calculate benefits](#)

Your estimated benefits

GALVANIZE DATA SCIENCE IMMERSIVE

Tuition & fees: \$17,980

VA pays to provider: ([Learn more](#)) \$17,980

Upon enrollment in program (25%): \$4,495

Upon completion of program (25%): \$4,495

Upon employment (50%): \$8,990

Out of pocket tuition: \$0

Housing allowance

([Learn more](#))

In-person monthly rate: \$2,916

Online monthly rate: \$825

Note: Your VET TEC training won't count against your GI Bill entitlement.

- Most participants understood the general VET TEC benefits and were positive about the program
- Participants' understanding of the "Approved programs" accordion varied from what was intended (e.g. anticipating the green check meant the program was approved, changing the program in the Benefits area would change it in the Programs area)

"I'm sure there would be some fine details like when money is coming through [I would ask about], but most info I'd want to know is here."

- P4

"To me, [Approved programs] could be one of two things: training programs within the same technical university or comparison programs. I really don't know."

- P2

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Revise content and iconography within "Approved programs" accordion to make it more intuitive for users
- Evaluate improvements during upcoming CT testing efforts

Finding 6

Technical issues and a lack of participants prevented conclusive testing of the "bottom sheet" on mobile devices

Use the fields below to calculate your benefits:

Your benefits —

What's your military status?

Veteran ▾

Which GI Bill benefit do you want to use?
([Learn more](#))

Post-9/11 GI Bill (Ch 33) ▾

Cumulative Post-9/11 active-duty service
([Learn more](#))

36+ months: 100% (includes BASIC) ▾

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☒ Yes

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Your estimated benefits v

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- Testing with a newer iPhone resulted in a display that was too large to allow bottom sheet to display as anticipated
- Android device user engaged with bottom sheet but scrolled past it quickly

"When I first clicked on your benefits, it pops up, but it doesn't stay up, and sometimes it seems to come up right away. If that flashed out right away, I would be frustrated."

- P10

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Update appearance of bottom sheet (on-page load) and retest before deploying
- Adding "Update benefits" button within each accordion so visibility is not an issue will also help with mobile devices and those using assistive tech
- Improve mobile usability by triggering numeric keyboard for all number-based fields

Findings for other projects

Findings for other projects

Participants provided valuable, task-specific input on their expectations for content and functionality

- Catalog and refine issues and improvements for future efforts

Nearly every participant struggled finding schools and VET TEC programs using search on the CT landing page

- Update CT search to behave more like a standard search tool

Many participants mentioned they'd like the ability to “save” schools or compare them side-by-side

- Consider adding comparison functionality

Next Steps

Next Steps

1. Refine UIs as noted in recommendations
2. Deploy to production
3. Define & deploy Google analytics



DIGITAL SERVICE at VA

Thank you