

Prototype Research Readout

School Resources Page Migration



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

As a School Certifying Official (SCO) or School Administrator, I want to be able to easily locate resources that aid me in certifying students and responding to student inquiries.

I'd like to feel confident that I have all of the necessary information to support military connected students.

The Product

This research is being conducted to gain an understanding of the informational needs of School Certifying Officials (SCO) and School Administrators.

Based on the research, the School Resources content will be reorganized in a clear and logical way, so the most important content is easy to find and use.

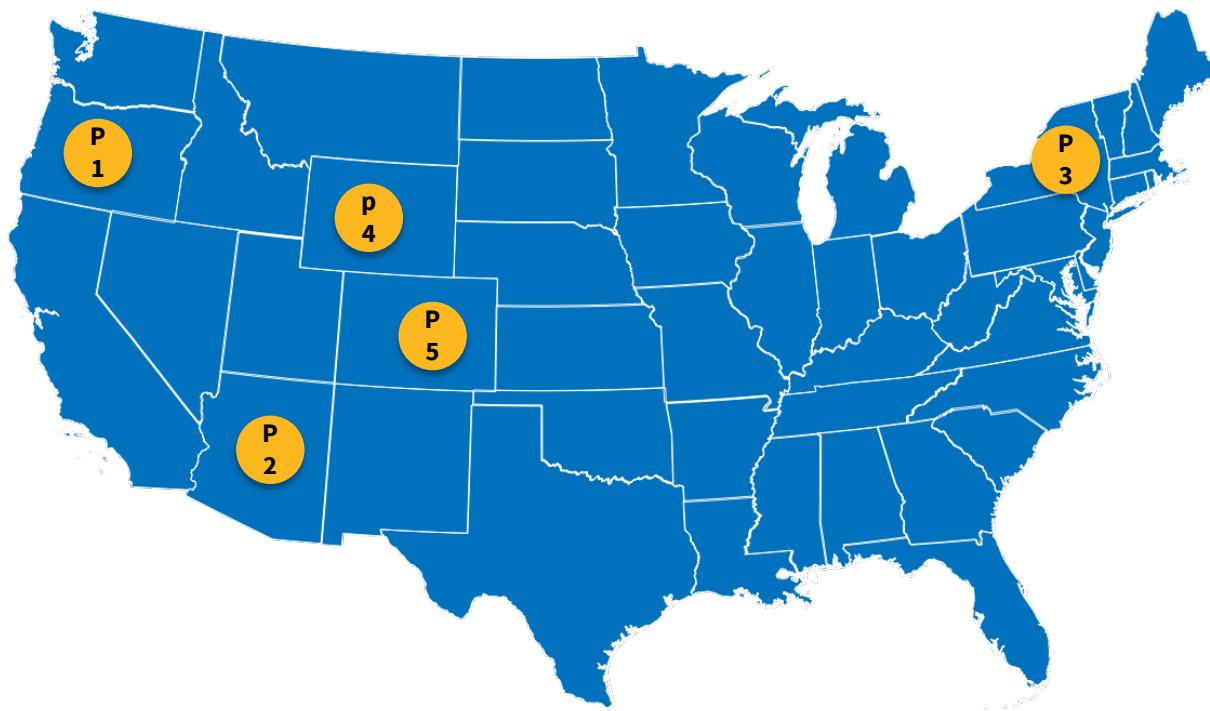
Why This Testing?

We want to validate that our prototype addresses the needs of School Certifying Officials and School Administrators before we begin development.

What We Did

Research Activities | Participants

Participants



5

Colleges &
Universities
(9, 60, 68, 460,
6240 GI Bill
Students)

5

School Certifying
Officials
(2 Male
3 Female)

4

4-Year Colleges

1

2-Year
Community
College

Research Methods

The screenshot shows the 'Resources for schools' section of the VA website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links to 'Home', 'Education', and 'Resources for schools'. Below this, a large heading 'Resources for schools' is displayed. To the right of the heading is a green icon representing a document or handbook. A sidebar on the left contains sections for 'Training and guides', 'Upcoming events', and 'Policies and procedures'. The main content area features a 'FAQs for GI Bill' section with a 'Submit a question' button, and an 'Average processing times' section. There are also links to 'Email us', 'Get updates', 'Call us', and 'Other resources to support your students'.

The following research method was used:

- Moderated Usability Testing of a high-fidelity prototype with 5 School Certifying Officials.
- Testing was conducted October 17th & 18th.

What We Learned

Generally SCOs found the redesigned page helpful and appreciate that the VA is attempting to make their experience even better.

*“Thank you so much for doing this.
This is tangible, clear evidence that
people are trying to make a better,
dynamic experience.”*

- P1

Finding 1

From benefits.va.gov



Ability to navigate to the SCO page varies based on the starting point.

From va.gov

A screenshot of the VA website's 'Education and Training Benefits' page. The top navigation bar includes 'VA Benefits and Health Care', 'About VA', 'Find a VA Location', 'Sign In', and 'Search'. The main content area features a 'Get GI Bill® and other education benefits' section with a graduation cap icon. Below it, there are sections for 'Manage your VA benefits and health care' and 'Manage your Veterans education benefits'. The bottom of the page includes a 'VA Benefits' footer with links to various VA programs and services.

- Navigate to the SCO page easily from benefits.va.gov via the existing “For School Administrators” nav link
- Find navigating from the va.gov home page very challenging
- Unsure where link on va.gov would be as they understand the content to be Veteran- and family-focused
- Indicate that the text of the current “Not a Veteran?” callout on the E&T page, is satisfactory

From benefits.va.gov

“This is the way I generally go.”

- P4

From va.gov

For me, I wouldn’t haven’t have looked at that [callout in the right column]. It seems a little hidden compared to everything else.”

- P1

Recommendation

VA.gov

- Continue displaying the current “Not a Veteran?” callout, so any who already use it can continue using it.
- As non-Veteran-focused tier 2 content is migrated to Drupal, determine the best path to the School Resources page.

Benefits.va.gov

- Repurpose existing “For School Administrators” nav item to build on known navigational pathways.
- Redirect all links to the current School Resources pages to the new page. Ideally, re-redirects will occur server-side.

Search Engine Optimization

- Follow SEO best practices to optimize page for findability via search engines.

SCOs appreciate various aspects of the DSVA design style

The screenshot shows the 'School Certifying Official (SCO) Handbook' page. At the top right is a green button labeled 'School Certifying Official (SCO) Handbook'. Below it is a section titled 'Ask questions' with a 'Submit a question' button. To the left is a sidebar with sections for 'On this page', 'Key Resources for SCOS', 'Latest announcements from VA', 'Training and guides', 'Upcoming events', and 'Policies and procedures'. The main content area contains information about the SCO handbook, average processing times, and contact options like email and phone.



- Appreciate the openness of the new design
- Feel the page flows well
- Indicate that they can find information quickly, which will enable them do their job faster & more easily

***“New, clean, streamlined layout makes it
a lot easier to scan information and find
resources...I like is how open it is.”***

- P1

***“It looks so clean and organized...so
clean and crisp and bright.”***

- P4

Recommendation

- Continue using the DSVA style.

Finding 3

SCOs are able to find key resources to do their job and support students

The screenshot shows the VA Resources for Schools website. The main navigation bar includes 'VA' and 'Resources for Schools'. Below it, 'Education' and 'Resources for schools' are selected. The main content area is titled 'Resources for schools' and contains the following sections:

- On this page**: Includes 'Program policies', 'Licensing info', and 'Politics and procedures'.
- Key Resources for SCOs**: Includes links to 'SCO Handbook', 'VA-GI-ONCE', 'VA-GI-ONCE Quick Reference', 'WEAMS', and 'Find your ELR'.
- Latest announcements from VA**: Lists three items:
 - 10/1/2019 - VA now serving as State-Approving Agency for California
 - 10/19/2019 - Release of revised School Certifying Official Handbook
 - 7/10/2019 - Yellow Ribbon Program Information available for 2019-2020 Academic Year
- Training and guides**: A section with a green background containing text about training and guides for SCOs, followed by a list of resources:
 - Required 2019 Training for School Certifying Officials (SCOs)
 - Required if your school has 20 or more GI Bill students
 - Essentials for School Certifying Officials
 - VAs-GI-ONCE Information
 - Non-traditional schools
 - Advanced topics
- Upcoming events**: Lists three events:
 - Arizona Veterans Program Association 2019 Fall Mini-Conference
 - Oklahoma Veterans Education Specialists Association (OVESA) Fall Conference
 - VBA Education Service 4th Quarterly Webinar
- Policies and procedures**: A section with a green background containing text about policies and procedures, followed by a list of resources:
 - GI Bill policies and procedures that apply to GI Bill legislation and VA educational programs and benefits
 - Yellow Ribbon Program Information
 - Principles of Excellence
 - VA education forms, brochures and fact sheets
- Other resources to support your students**: A section with a green background containing text about other resources, followed by a list of resources:
 - Begin the GI Bill program approval process
 - Learn about GI Bill programs and related policies



- Appreciate the prominence of
 - Key Resources
 - SCO Handbook
 - Essential training
 - Announcements
 - Submit a Question
- Indicate that the forms are easy to find and useful
- Able to access key resources, such as Connect with us, Processing times, and Resources for students, so they can effectively support students

“ “These [essential training links] are great...I think I’d use them all.” P4

“I like how [the SCO Handbook] is right there on the right side.” P3

“[These key resources are] actually helpful... All five of these links are things I’ve had to click around to find before. So that they are right here is really nice.” P1

Recommendation

- No change needed.

Finding 4

Webinars are considered both training and events

Training and guides

Get training and boost your skills using these resources for School Certifying Officials (SCOs) serving military-connected students.

[Required 2019 training for School Certifying Officials \(SCOs\) >](#)
Required if your school has 20 or more GI Bill students.

Essentials for School Certifying Officials +

VA-ONCE information +

Non-traditional schools +

Advanced topics +

★★★★★

Upcoming events

[Arizona Veterans Program Association-2019 Fall Mini-Conference >](#)
November 1, 2019 — Mesa, AZ

[Oklahoma Veterans Education Specialists Association \(OVESA\) Fall Conference >](#)
November 4–6, 2019 — Stillwater, OK

[VBA Education Service 1st Quarterly Webinar >](#)
December 19 & 20, 2019 — Online

See full list of [Conferences and Events](#) | [Training Webinars](#)



- Some look for webinars in training.
- Some look for webinars in upcoming events.

“I would just click on upcoming events or the training.”

- P4

“So I’d probably look at [the Upcoming event] information here, Training Webinars.

- P1

Recommendation

- Continue showing webinars in upcoming events.
- Add upcoming webinars to the webinar page so users see both upcoming opportunities and access past slide decks on the same page.

Finding 5

SCOs are able to easily locate resources to support students



- All can easily find the “Resources to support students” section
- Many find the “How to apply” and “Scholarships” links useful
- Frequently need content that is written with beneficiaries as the intended audience

Other resources to support your students

[How to apply for education benefits](#)

[Scholarships and financial aid](#)

[Adult College Completion Toolkit](#)

[Employment assistance](#)

[Payment and debt information resources](#)

[CareerScope aptitude assessment](#)

[GI Bill Comparison Tool](#)

“I’m looking for things that I can pass on to students that are more relevant to them and less meant for me...I like to be able to direct them to the place [and tell them this is] where I found it, so you can come back here to find this, and this, and this.”

- P1

Recommendation

- Continue providing beneficiary-focused resources that SCOs can share with students.
- Continue to monitor SCO requests for Resources to Support Students to refine and optimize this list.

Finding 6

Some users focus on hyperlinks, some on accordions, and some on both

Training and guides

Get training and boost your skills using these resources for School Certifying Officials (SCOs) serving military-connected students.

[Required 2019 training for School Certifying Officials \(SCOs\) >](#)
Required if your school has 20 or more GI Bill students.

- Essentials for School Certifying Officials +
- VA-ONCE information +
- Non-traditional schools +
- Advanced topics +

- When users focus on the blue links, they often missed the gray boxes and visa versa
- The longer label seemed more challenging for users to scan

Policies and procedures

Learn about policies and procedures that apply to GI Bill legislation and VA educational programs and benefits.

[Yellow Ribbon Program information >](#)
[Principles of Excellence >](#)
[VA education forms, brochures and factsheets >](#)

- Begin the GI Bill program approval process +
- Learn about GI Bill programs and related policies +

“I don't see a link for the actual training itself though...I completely over looked [the ‘Required Training’ link]. My eyes were immediately drawn to the boxes.”

- P3

Recommendation

- Place the majority of hyperlinks in accordions, so users are not visually distracted from opening accordions.
- Shorten long accordion labels so they are easily scannable.

Finding 7

SCOs typically didn't engage with or intuit the “Advanced topics”

The screenshot shows a website's sidebar with an open accordion menu titled "Advanced topics". The menu contains several sections with links:

- Check your status as a Covered Institution >**
- Common causes of school overpayments and how to avoid them >**
- Updated procedures for reporting students on academic probation >**
- Payment and debt information resources >**
- The Treasury Offset Program: How to receive your state and federal funding >**
- Colmery extension campus update:**
 - [SCO Open House Presentation - July 2019](#)
 - [SCO Virtual Webinar Presentation - July 2019](#)
- Extension campus certification scenarios:**
 - [Certification at a main and extension campus](#)
 - [Certification for distance hours at an extension campus](#)
 - [Reduction of hours at an extension campus](#)
 - [All credit hours dropped at an extension campus](#)
 - [Certification at a main and two extension campuses with non-standard terms](#)

- While some SCOs opened Advanced topics, others were not drawn to open the “Advanced topics” accordion
- SCOs expected to find information on:
 - Complex Certifications
 - Reporting (85/15, academic probation, graduation, etc.)
 - Payments & Debt (and preparing for a VA audit)
 - School Program Approval

“Honestly [‘Advanced topics’] seems kind of broad, so I wouldn’t know what to expect until I clicked.”

- P1

[After opening “Advanced topics”]

“Boy, this is a real mixed bag of topics.”

- P4

Recommendation

- Replace the “Advanced topics” accordion with more specific accordions that address key areas in which SCO questions arise.
- Shorten lengthy accordion labels to make them easier to scan quickly.

Finding 8

SCOs find value in knowing the current processing speed

Average processing times -

First time applications:
24 days

Supplemental claims:
10 days

A supplemental claim is a re-enrollment or other change that impacts VA benefits.

See [FAQ](#) for more information.



- Want to give students an accurate estimate of how long it will take for claims to be processed
- Know that processing speed varies by month
- Wonder how frequently the processing time will be updated

“Average processing times, does this [content] change by time of year?...[A last updated date] would help.”

- P5

Recommendation

- Add “Last Updated” info within the Average Processing Times widget to give SCOs an idea of content freshness.

Next Steps

Next Steps

1. Approval and sign-offs
2. Draft content strategy
3. Begin development



DIGITAL SERVICE at VA

Thank you

Appendices

Additional Content | Findings for Other Projects | Participant Details

Additional Content

Appendix A

Additional content that SCOs requested to better assist military-connected students include the following:

- Add STEM Scholarship information to the existing Scholarship page on benefits.va.gov
[https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/non_va_resources.asp - financial aid.](https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/non_va_resources.asp-financial_aid)
- Create content that describes the process for using gifted GI Bill benefits (i.e., when GI Bill benefits can be gifted, how to obtain COE).
- Create content that lets school administrators know how to help Voc Rehab students “Find your VA Counselor”.
- Create a GI Bill comparison chart that describes differences in benefits, how they pay out, etc..
- Include more information on Ch35 and Ch31.

Findings for Other Projects

Appendix B: Findings for Other Projects

Search feature could be improved

- Allow users to limit their search to particular areas, such as education, so results are more relevant.

Participant Details

Background: SCO for 4 months

- Key findings:
- Likes Key Resources at the top. They are all resources he's search for in the past.
 - Likes content that is written for students - with students as the intended audience.
 - Likes finding things on the student site so he can help them learn where to find other things in the future.
 - Liked finding the group of factsheets - looked again for one on studying abroad.
 - For finding SCO Handbook, would google, would look in the educ tile, used the top nav item and selected all EDU to access the page, did not really find the callout - too hidden.
 - Tend to ignore content in the right column, though he found the SCO Handbook in the right column.
 - Easily found link to the Training Requirements for 2019 as the link was bold.
 - Thinks the FAQ page is pretty daunting.
 - Expects Essentials to contain - training specific to role, how to certify, SCO Handbook; VA Once – handbook; Non-traditional schools - (non standard terms, non-degree programs); "Advanced topics" is broad. STEM Info?.
 - Like how open the new design seems. It's not all squished together.
 - Likes the ease of use, it's better, clear.
 - He focuses primarily on the main content area and tends to disregard the right column, not sure why.
 - Like having the SCO Handbook very accessible.
 - Likes and recognized Submit a question.
 - Might move training up, though not sure why.
 - Notice the blue box of the announcements, but the content inside did not register for him.
 - In Policies and Procedures - maybe the SCO Handbook, FAQs.
 - Likes factsheets.
 - When possible, he shows them where to go on va.gov to build their skills and knowledge.

Background: SCO for 3.5 years

Key findings:

- Unable to find a path to SA Pages and SCO Handbook on va.gov homepage or EDU Landing page.
- Given that va.gov is for Veterans and their families, did not expect to see a SCO link.
- Able to quickly find the SCO Handbook on the SR page.
- Considered an online session to be a "webinar".
- Wondered if the online session would be in training.
- Found Webinars once we confirmed that he was looking for a webinar.
- Was able to easily find the scholarship info in the Resources for Students section.
- Assumed he'd find info about BAH calculation changes in the Announcements section.
- Found STEM info in the GI Bill accordion in the Policy section.
- He expected to find updates about Colmery and STEM in the GI Bill Accordion in the Policy section. (and perhaps some FAQs).
- Is comfortable with the current order of the sections.
- Like having the phone numbers along the side.
- "I like it. It flows well."
- Label options "School Certifying Officials" School Certifying Staff".
- skills and knowledge.

Background: SCO for 6 years

Key findings:

- Easily navigated to the School Resources page from the "For School Administrators" link on benefits.va.gov.
- Visits the current SR pages 3-4 times a week, less in the middle of the semester).
- Accesses the current SR pages for training, SCO Handbook and VA-ONCE.
- Found the SCO Handbook right away.
- Used the training and guides anchor link.
- Did not notice the Required Training link (pre-re-labelling) above Essential Training accordion.
- Thought STEM Scholarship might be an advanced topic, then tried the scholarship link.
- Liked Essentials accordion, specifically SCO Handbook, VA-ONCE, ELR, WEAMs, A-Z.
- Might add Chap 31 Voc Rehab and how to find your VA Counselor for Chap 31. in Essentials.
- In training only opened the accordions and missed the link above, however, in Policies, only commented on the links above and did not open the accordions.
- In advanced topics, would expect complex certification scenarios, extension campus certification changes, how schools get programs approved, reporting (85/15 ratio), degree certification approval, etc. as categories.
- Liked that forms are easy to find as she often has to search around for them.
- Easily found Scholarship info in the Resources for Students area.
- Would like to see the online BAH students, though generally lets students calculate housing themselves, so SCO is not responsible for mis-quoting the amount.
- Typically sign up for webinars via email response rather than on the website.
- Recommendation for EDU: Include the dial-in info on the webinar page, so both future and past webinars appear on the same page.
- "I like it. It flows well."
- Likes having the announcements and processing times
- Likes that Submit a Question and FAQs are in about the same area as on the traditional page.

P4 | Female | SCO | 4-year College with 2 SCO | 400 GI Bill Students | Wyoming

Background: SCO for less than 1 year

Key findings:

- Quickly navigated into the page from benefits.va.gov.
- Easily found the SCO Handbook and liked that there were multiple links for it.
- Used anchor links frequently.
- Liked announcements.
- Noticed and liked the Submit a Question.
- Liked the phone numbers.
- Did not think to open the lower set of accordions.
- Thought the program approval process was for Veterans being approved.
- Thought Yellow Ribbon was not as important and could go lower in the list or in the accordion (She already knows about it).
- Thought forms, brochures and factsheets was useful and should be prominent.
- Liked links 1 & 2 in the Student Resources section (How to apply and scholarships) as students frequently ask how to apply.
- Found STEM Scholarship info in the factsheets section (did not think to look for it in the GI Bill Policy and Programs area).
- Searched for a "Past Webinars" link.
- Clean, crisp and clear.
- Liked the Essentials links.
- Advanced topics could include "Payment & Debt", "Extension campuses".
- Thought "Advanced Topics" would contain "Future changes".
- Looked for BAH calculations changes in Factsheets (Forever GI Bill Changes or Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits).
- Quickly found scholarship information in the Student Resources area.

P5 | Female | SCO | 4-year College with 1 SCO | 9 GI Bill Students | Colorado

Background: Director of Financial Aid with previous SCO experience

Key findings:

- Able to quickly navigate from benefits.va.gov to the new SCO pages.
- Able to quickly find the SCO Handbook.
- Able to quickly find 2019 Required training.
- Able to quickly find a webinar.
- Able to quickly find STEM Content.
- Wonders whether the processing times are recent. Also wanted _____ date stamped.
- Interested in being able to determine what has changed since last visit.
- Interested in info on Chapter 35 (How does it pay out, schools do not see the dollars, what veterans are eligible for - Perhaps in the context of a chart that compares the various GI Bill benefits).
- Complicated training topics: Debt would be #1 - how to handle debt issues. Bill arrives separately from debt letters. "VA Audit" is another topic. How to prepare for an audit, what to present to auditor.
- Move "Find Your ELR" from the list of Key Resources to the Contact area. Would look for it in the contact area. (With one less link, the 4 remaining Key Resources will pop more.)
- New Content: Gifted GI Bill benefit information would be useful.
- Able to quickly find BAH Calculation information.
- Able to quickly find scholarship information. P5
- Like fresh design. Like not having long list of links. P5