

Evaluation of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program  
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This report details the administrative process and outcomes for the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship (VLCP) program and recipients at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, funded by the Estate of William F. Vilas. The report is presented to the Vilas Trustees and the Office of the Provost in three sections:

- Section I:** Administrative details of the program.
- Section II:** Experiences and outcomes of VLCP recipients.
- Section III:** Progress and highlights of recipient's scholarship and productivity.<sup>1</sup>

### **Section I: Administrative Details**

The Vilas Life Cycle Professorship (VLCP) program is administered by the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI), as authorized by the Office of the Provost. The Vilas Trustees generously awarded \$372,000 for the program in 2008/09, the same amount as the previous year. All faculty and permanent principal investigators, regardless of divisional affiliation, are eligible for these funds. Per the stipulations of the Estate, no Vilas funds are to be used for the recipient's salary and individual awards are not to exceed \$30,000. In addition, all awardees are vetted with the Office of the Provost prior to establishing an award in order to ensure that each recipient is in good standing with the University.

#### Reviewer Panel

WISELI has enlisted the following faculty/staff to read applications and make funding decisions:

- **Jennifer Sheridan.** An associate scientist and a sociologist by training, Dr. Sheridan represents the social studies division. Dr. Sheridan has administered the original Life Cycle Research Grant (LCRG) program since its inception in 2002, as well as serving on the VLCP panel since the Vilas Trust began funding the awards in 2005.
- **Amy Wendt.** A professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Dr. Wendt represents the physical sciences division. Dr. Wendt has served on the review panel of the former LCRG program since its inception.
- **Jane Zuengler.** Dr. Zuengler is a professor of English, and represents the arts & humanities division. Dr. Zuengler replaced Dr. Cecilia Ford on the review panel.
- **Nancy Mathews.** Dr. Mathews is an Associate Professor in the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, and represents the biological sciences division. Dr. Mathews is a former recipient of the original LCRG program.

#### Applicants and Awards

Because flexibility is of utmost importance to faculty who are experiencing life crises, we established three deadlines for applications for the VLCP program for 2008/09.

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<sup>1</sup> To maintain confidentiality, the public will have access to only Sections I and II.

- **Round 1.** Deadline May 30, 2008. Applications received: 14 (including 2 that were deferred from the previous year). Total amount requested: \$393,987. Applications funded: 8. Total amount awarded: \$191,949.
- **Round 2.** Deadline October 3, 2008. Applications received: 4. Total amount requested: \$103,425. Applications funded: 3. Total amount awarded: \$76,634 (\$29,172 of this sum will be spent in the 2009/10 academic year).
- **Round 3.** Deadline January 2, 2009. Applications received: 4 (including 2 that were deferred from previous rounds). Total amount requested: \$103,121. Applications funded: 4. Total amount awarded: \$102,228 (\$67,823 of this sum will be spent in the 2009/10 academic year).

• **SUMMARY, 2008/09:** Applications received: 18. Total amount requested: \$490,238. Applications funded: 15 (including two that applied in previous year). Total amount awarded: \$370,811 (\$96,995 of this sum will be spent in the 2009/10 academic year).

### Recipient Demographics

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants and recipients are very diverse:

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Recipients<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	12	9
Male	6	6
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>3</sup></b>		
Faculty of Color	5	4
Majority Faculty	13	11
<b>Title</b>		
Assistant Professor	6	5
Associate Professor	4	2
Professor	7	7
Permanent PI/Academic Staff	1	1
<b>Division</b>		
Biological Sciences	3	2
Physical Sciences	2	2
Social Studies	6	6
Arts & Humanities	6	5

<sup>2</sup> Two recipients are not counted in the “Applicants” column, because they were included in last year’s annual report; they applied in 2007/08, but were awarded in 2008/09.

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Color are those whose “heritage code” is listed as Black, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic in University records. Majority Faculty are listed as “Other.”

## Issues Arising in 2008/09

Because we did not have a backlog of Vilas Life Cycle Professorships to fund that were left over from FY08 (due to the cancellation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> round), we had more funds in 2008/09 than usual. Even though we received approximately the same number of applications, and funded approximately the same number and for the same amounts, we came in \$54,194 under budget. This may be fortuitous, as the Vilas Trust has fewer funds available this year and will not be able to fund the VLCPs for 2009/10. Fortunately, the UW-Madison will be able to cover the \$96,995 in award commitments we already made this year. The VLCP administrative team is looking for alternative sources of funding for 2009/10, so that we can continue to offer this program for at least a minimal level next year.

## Credit Given to the VLCP Program

In the Spring 2009 issue of the *On Wisconsin* alumni magazine, Prof. Lydia Zepeda publicly attributed the funding of her research to a Vilas Life Cycle (grant) on page 12:

**See Food?**  
Photographing meals aids healthy eating.

When it comes to watching what you eat, it pays to watch closely — and take a picture. According to a study conducted by consumer science professor **Lydia Zepeda** and graduate student **David Deal**, people who photographed their meals tended to follow a healthier diet.

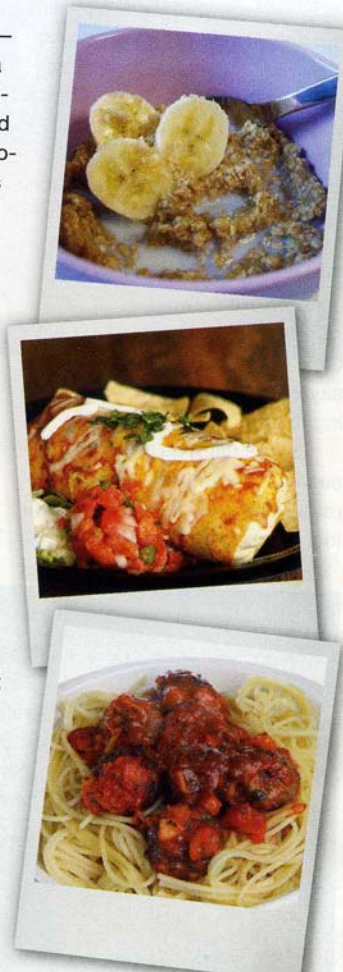
The study was conducted in 2006, when Zepeda and Deal asked forty-three volunteers to photograph everything they ate before consuming it. The goal was not to encourage weight loss so much as to study how people make decisions about the foods they eat.

“We know that food diaries — where people record everything they’ve eaten — are a common tool used in dieting,” Zepeda says. “But journaling is done after the fact, after the food has been eaten. To photograph the meal, you’ve got to record it before you eat.”

They found that people are increasingly conscious of what’s on their plates — and reluctant to eat anything inappropriate.

The study was funded with the aid of a Vilas Life Cycle grant from the Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute.

J.A.



ISTOCKPHOTO (3)

## Section II: Recipient Experiences and Outcomes

In spring of 2009, the VCLP recipients whose awards ended by June 2008 were invited to evaluate the VLCP program by responding to a questionnaire; fourteen chose to do so. The recipients were asked to describe how the funds were used and if the grant allowed them to progress professionally. They were also asked to identify any positive or negative outcomes from receiving the grant and to provide an update on their progress. Section II highlights their responses to the questionnaire, while Section III provides updated information about their research and scholarship.

### Why and How the Funds Were Used

The recipients' experiences and life crises varied greatly. Each had his or her own mixture of events and timing that created the "perfect storm" and wreaked havoc on their professional lives. In general, common reasons for applying for the grant included the physical or psychological health of themselves or others, limited resources and support, and life-altering events, such as family members' deaths or an impending divorce. Examples of these experiences and how the money was used are reflected in the following quotes:

The funds I received from the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program were instrumental in allowing me to make progress professionally while coping with the very difficult family issue of the health of my daughter. I was able to use the laptop purchased to continue to work while I was in various hospitals and doctor's offices. I was also able to participate in professional conferences with the funding received from the Vilas grant. I am currently up for tenure and without the help of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program, I seriously doubt that tenure would be possible. Thanks in large part to the Vilas program; my record is strong enough for my department to put me up for tenure.

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I developed a disabling condition in my right shoulder and hand, which meant I could not type at all or take any notes. The funds were tremendously helpful. First of all, they enabled me to buy new computer equipment on which I could use the most recent version of Dragon Dictate, a dictation software. In addition, I was able to attend several conferences which crucially renewed my participation and standing in my field. I was also able to hire an undergraduate at certain crucial times to help with typing that could not be done via dictation.

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Two deaths in the immediate family and a broken arm, on top of being a single mother of three, delayed my research and publishing goals. The grant supplemented research funding that allowed my project staff to keep up their parts of the research while I was dealing with these issues. Because I kept up my research, it attracted funding from a national funder, with whom we are now working on a multi-year partnership agreement. [Without these funds], the project would have been delayed, perhaps significantly enough to cost me tenure. I will be up for tenure this year.

### View of the VLCP Program

Similar to results found in years past, the recipients viewed the VLCP program very positively and did not offer any negative comments or consequences to being awarded the grant. They were

grateful for the funds that this program provided them and recognized how this grant allowed them to progress professionally during their life crises. Often, their gratitude was reflected in their thoughts and opinions about the University overall. Direct quotes from participants include:

I heartfully can tell you that this program was the most significant help I *ever* received from the University, or any major national program. Its non-competitive nature, its generosity, and speed were absolutely crucial in helping me, and feeling valued by the university in its investing in my work—and person—as part of a long-term agenda, rather than a reward for past achievements, or future/ongoing projects. I am extremely grateful to VLCP, and will remember it as a major asset and support I have received in this institution.

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I think it is a terribly important program. It gave me a bit of hope that there can be a humane place for faculty in the university.

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This program is invaluable...There is no comparable program at the university.

When asked if or how they informed others about the grant, most had communicated about it. Those who answered in the affirmative, explain how they informed others:

I have told many colleagues about it. I described it as a source of bridge funding for critical times in your life. My department and colleagues appeared to perceive it as a very reasonable mechanism – since as one colleague put it, everyone has times like that in his/her life at some point. It's great to know there is a safety net and that someone actually cares!

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I have told others about this grant and have described it as, “a professional life saver.”

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I have told people about the grant. I think it helps support my assertion that life issues can be detrimental to research progress. It is very positive that the VLCP is committed to supporting faculty in difficult situations.

One recipient noted its very positive view within her department:

Receiving this grant was announced with congratulations in our faculty departmental meeting, and I have a sense it is perceived well. I have told others about it, and I describe it as, “special funds that help bridge life’s unexpected curve balls.”

For the very few who chose to maintain their anonymity as a recipient of the grant, they did not want to discuss their personal lives and unfortunate events with colleagues. They felt uncomfortable sharing these areas of their lives in the workplace and hoped that the VLCP could be quietly used to maintain their professionalism and progress.

#### The VLCP Serves to Retain Faculty and Others

Clearly, the VLCP served to retain a number of faculty members who were at risk of leaving the UW. Over half of those who responded to the questionnaire admitted that they would have left the University without the funds, or would inevitably leave due to not achieving tenure. One

faculty member said that she would have “absolutely” left without the VLCP. One recipient noted that she considered working at another university, but notes, “VLCP greatly increased my trust in and gratitude toward UW-Madison.” Ultimately, she chose to remain at the UW. Others admitted they would have stayed, but hypothesized about their ability to function or be promoted:

I probably would have stayed at UW Madison—the question is, Would I have remained a productive and contributing scientist and professor on this campus?

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I believe that my chances of receiving tenure at UW-Madison would have been greatly reduced if I had not been funded by the VLCP program. The funds allowed me to continue to be productive while being in the hospital when my family member was ill. I was able to continue working on my research despite this major life event.

Besides faculty members, the grant also allowed other UW employees to keep their jobs or enabled the recipient to support an undergraduate or graduate student. In particular, lab technicians, post doctoral researchers and graduate students remained, due to the help of the grants:

My kind of work requires intense and competent work at the “lab bench.” At the time, I no longer had enough money to pay my best graduate student who was very near graduating and was willing to stay on a few extra months to help me acquire data for my NIH grant application. Without funding from the VLCP I would have had to let this student go. Because of VLCP he stayed on and acquired critical new data that were instrumental to the success of my NIH grant application.

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[Post doc Name] was paid with these funds and has generated almost all of the preliminary data for my recent R01 submission. Moreover, she has become my “go to” person in the lab, since she helps supervise graduate students, provides feedback on my grants, and helps run the lab.

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My personal situation reduced my publication rate so that I was not able to get my NIH-RO1 grant renewed. The funds from the life-cycle grant allowed me to maintain my technician so that we were able to publish the manuscripts we needed to secure funding for the lab. Keeping my technician on allowed us to publish several manuscripts that were close to completion. These manuscripts were then used as the preliminary data to obtain grants from external funders.

In regards to retention, two recipients concluded that it is an ethical imperative and in the University’s best interest to provide these monies:

Human capital is essential to the success of any organization. Supporting the contributions of faculty to the research, teaching and service missions of the university must go beyond what happens in the classroom or lab. The university must recognize that while most faculty are passionate about their work and willing to commit a large portion of their lives to scholarly activity, there are times when personal circumstances must take priority. Retaining the highly qualified individuals that the UW-Madison hires requires flexibility, understanding and support.

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[The UW] must do everything it can within reason and possibly, financially. The university invests a tremendous amount of money, people, energy and other resources into attracting new faculty to this campus. If all evidence suggests that that faculty member has contributed positively to the campus throughout his/her tenure here, then it makes both ethical and financial sense to help that faculty member through difficult times. Anything less would be a disservice to the university and the people in this state who depend on it.

### Provided Support and Resources

As mentioned in previous sections, the grant was used to fund various resources—human and otherwise. Some used the funds to purchase technologies to accomplish their work, while others used it to travel to collect data or present research findings. The recipients noted that they were unable to obtain what they needed through the usual channels:

At the time I had such a hard time, I did not feel that there was any supportive place to turn—particularly as an assistant professor. If resources existed, I was not aware of them, and I did not feel I could ask for anything in my department.

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I think bridge funding such as the life-cycle grant is THE most important thing that the university can do to help faculty during major life events. Adding time onto the tenure clock is helpful, but it is not helpful if the faculty member has to dismantle the lab that they have worked so hard to build.

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Initiatives such as the VLCP, the Ombuds program or the tenure-clock extension policies send the message that the university cares about its employees. Resources can be stepping stones to success. They enable faculty to acknowledge and address crises that arise in the course of life and to successfully accomplish both personal and professional objectives.

The VLCP program enabled the recipients to remain at the UW, allowed them to address their personal crises, and provided resources to meet their professional demands. All of the respondents noted that they were able to progress professionally and in many cases, they received grants or were promoted due to the VLCP funds. This next session highlights how the faculty member's research progressed, and grants, publications and presentations that they directly attribute to the VLCP.

## **Section III: Research Progress and Scholarship Highlights**

*Section III has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the VLCP recipients.*