

## 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<sup>1</sup>:

**Section I:** Administrative Details

**Section II:** Experiences and Outcomes of VLCP Recipients

**Section III:** Scholarship Progress and Highlights

### Section I: Administrative Details

The 2015/16 academic year marks the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Vilas Life Cycle Professorships at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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 awarded an unprecedented \$850,000 for the program in 2015/16. This increase allowed the program to consider, on a pilot basis, a new type of application for 2015/16. For the first time, we considered “life events” that were work-related issues and problems, instead of exclusively considering only life events that occur outside the UW-Madison (see attached publication, “Life Happens,” for a description of this need.) The large award also allowed us to increase the individual ceiling for awards to \$40,000—a welcome change, because the cost of one graduate student worker has been increasing well-above the previous \$30,000 ceiling.

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 \$40,000. 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.

### Review 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.

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

- **Jim Escalante.** Dr. Escalante is a professor of Art, and represents the Arts & Humanities Division.
- **Katrina Forest.** Dr. Forest is a Professor of Bacteriology, and represents the Biological Sciences Division. Dr. Forest was on sabbatical for the June 2015 round of applications.
- **Molly Carnes.** Dr. Carnes is a Professor of Medicine and is co-Director of WISELI. She replaced Dr. Forest on the review panel for the June 2015 round.

Applicants and Awards

We typically establish multiple deadlines for VLCP applications throughout the year, in order to increase the flexibility of the program for faculty in crisis. In 2015/16, we held three rounds of application review.

- **Round 1.** Deadline June 19, 2015. Applications received: 20. Total amount requested: \$719,607. Applications funded: 18. Total amount awarded: \$543,429 (\$11,278 of this sum will be spent in the 2016/17 academic year.)
- **Round 2.** Deadline September 25, 2015. Applications received: 20 (one was a reapplication from Round 1.) Total amount requested: \$624,714. Applications funded: 12. Total amount awarded: \$289,891 (\$155,418 of this sum will be spent in the 2016/17 academic year.)
- **Round 3.** Deadline December 25, 2015. Applications received: 16 (one was a reapplication from Round 2). Total amount requested: \$599,116. Applications funded: 6. Total amount awarded: \$206,094 (\$160,479 of this sum will be spent in the 2016/17 academic year.)

• **SUMMARY, 2015/16:** Applications received: 54 (two people applied twice). Total amount requested: \$1,881,845. Applications funded: 36. Total amount awarded: \$1,039,414 (\$327,175 of this sum will be spent in the 2016/17 academic year.)

Recipient Demographics

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants are very diverse:

	Applicants	Recipients
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	34	27
Male	20	9
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b>		
Faculty of Color	12	12
Majority Faculty	42	24
<b>Title</b>		
Assistant Professor	17	13

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Color are those whose “ethnic group code” is listed as Black, Asian, American Indian, Hispanic, or “2 or more races” in University records. Majority Faculty are listed as “White” or have missing data on the race indicator.

Associate Professor	21	15
Professor	16	8
Permanent PI/Academic Staff*	0	0
<b>Division</b>		
Biological Sciences	22	12
Physical Sciences	8	6
Social Studies	11	8
Arts & Humanities	13	10

\* Approximately 40 academic staff members have Permanent PI status.

### Issues Arising in 2015/16

This year was extraordinary. With the large increase in funds, we were able to broaden the scope of this program, and indeed, we received over double the number of applications normally received. The broadened criteria allowed for applications from persons who experienced difficulties at UW-Madison (as opposed to their personal life) that impacted their research, and these applications generally took one of two forms:

1. A work-related incident or crisis that impacted research. Examples include one applicant who had a research project sabotaged, and another faculty member discovered funds were misused by support staff resulting in loss of research.
2. Leadership or service duties that impacted research. These faculty typically volunteered or were pressed by their departments to run vital programs or to chair time-consuming committees or even take on the department chair role, and research productivity suffered as a result.

Because we anticipate returning to a normal level of funding, decisions about how or whether to include the expanded criteria into future calls for VLCP proposals will need to be made in the coming months. These decisions will be made in collaboration with the review committee and the Office of the Provost.

Faculty continue to request salary funding from the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program, and therefore we continue to ask the Provost to consider asking the Trustees for this capability for the VLCP program. This request will be reviewed by the Provost's Office and if deemed appropriate, will be forwarded to the Vilas Trustees for consideration.

### Visibility and Dissemination

A manuscript detailing the creation, administration, and outcomes of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program was published in 2015, and is included with this report. "Life Happens: The Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison" was published in the edited volume *Family Friendly Policies and Practices in Academe*, edited by Catherine Solomon and Erin Anderson.

## **Section II: Experiences and Outcomes of VLCP Recipients**

Evaluation findings from the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship (VLCP) program for the 2014-15 year mirrored many of the results discussed in previous reports. This was a “traditional” year of funding, which allowed twelve faculty and staff to continue their appointments and hold steady, or even be more productive, in their scholarship and careers (see Section III). Similar to previous years’ recipients, they dealt with many life events—illness of themselves or someone they cared for, death of loved ones, accidents, divorce, etc. The timing of these could have been disastrous to their careers, especially when compounded by multiple events occurring sequentially or simultaneously. All recipients indicated that they were grateful for the funds and that they were essential to allowing them to progress, remain at UW, and/or achieve tenure.

### **Grant Retained Faculty and Staff and Maintained Productivity**

As seen in the quotes below, the faculty who were pre-tenure noted that the VLCP was essential in moving them towards tenure, either immediately or in the near future.

My tenure case is already non-traditional, so if I had not been able to shore up scholarly work recognizable to my divisional committee, my colleagues felt I was at far more risk for not receiving tenure. When 2013 delivered so many stressful events, my productivity sank. Receiving the Vilas Life Cycle grant and the project assistant support it brought, enabled me to get back on track and solidify my tenure case. While the decision on my tenure will not be for three years, I am in a far better position than I would have been without the funding.

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I am deeply grateful for the support I received through the Vilas Life Cycle program. It enabled me to explore important questions in [my research]. I believe this work makes important contributions, and I know it was made possible in large part by the funding I received. The program was important in keeping me at UW-Madison and solidifying what I hope will someday be a successful tenure case. I have plenty of work remaining ahead of me, but the Vilas Life Cycle grant helped me ensure I am on the right road.

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The life event did put me at risk for leaving. Having the funds allowed me to patch together a research team to investigate a research question of global interest. In the process, the Vilas funds helped my bid for tenure.

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Without the assistance of the grant, my research and writing productivity would have been negatively affected and I likely would not have been able to complete my pre-tenure goals. This would have put me in danger of not getting tenure. In addition to helping me stay on track with my data analysis and writing, the Vilas Life Cycle grant made me feel

supported and appreciated as a faculty member at UW-Madison. It made me feel that the university is invested in my long-term success as a scholar.

For the faculty who were tenured, the grant played a role in their retention—not only at UW, but in academia generally. As an example, when asked if they were at a risk for leaving, one recipient noted, “Yes, from UW and academe more generally.” Another noted that she had received an offer from another university. She noted that the VLCP grant, along with a retention offer, led her to make the decision to stay at UW-Madison.

Because the recipients view the grant so positively, “retention” took many forms. Other recipients noted:

These events themselves did not put me at risk for leaving. But having access to funds like these makes it easier for me to consider staying now when other opportunities are presenting themselves.

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The life event did not put me at risk for leaving UW, but could have resulted in taking an extended period of family leave. The VLCP funds were instrumental in ensuring the continued operation of my lab in not only supporting my research, but also that of my collaborators and co-investigators. Most importantly, the funds (through the hire of a research specialist) provided a safeguard against noncompliance violations due to lack of proper and attentive oversight.

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I did consider leaving UW-Madison in part due to my son’s educational needs. I can definitely say that this funding support allowed me to stay and to resume my program of research.

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I don’t think I would have left UW-Madison. But it certainly helped to make me a much more vital faculty member in every aspect of my job.

Furthermore, they appreciated that the University cared for the faculty and staff:

The Vilas award is a bit longer term, not immediate in the case of an accident, but does go a long way for me to knowing that the University values the faculty. Particularly in these times of shrinking budgets and constant attack from the legislature, such small offerings do make it easier to feel like I want to stay here and continue to invest my own energy here.

Similar to previous years’ findings, the grant funds allowed the retention of a number of other staff—academic, postdoctoral scientists and graduate students. In the end, the grant allowed for the professional growth of others.

The funding allowed my student to complete her PhD. The papers from this work are currently being finalized and submitted. I've not realigned my career path, but it means that the work of this student has not gone to waste... It definitely allowed the work of this student to be completed and to allow me to fulfill a commitment to her. She is now a postdoc at [Name] University in the top lab in my field. Her career indirectly boosts mine.

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The funds were extremely important and I have much gratitude for the ability to hire a research specialist, a clinician and statistician, all part time. This team provided assistance with grant writing, implementation of a therapeutic approach we were piloting for later grant development and data analysis on data from a randomized trial. I was able to have time to write two grants and two papers and am currently working on two additional manuscripts... This funding assisted me a great deal in making progress on my research and this has resulted in nearly 2 million dollars in grant funding.

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The events were a significant distraction to my research and teaching program. Of the two, my research was most affected and I fell behind on grant-writing. The VLCP funds allowed me to continue to support a graduate student, and partially support a post-doc. Without the grant, I would have had to ask my post-doc to leave and to ask my graduate student to take a position as a TA. The papers and proposals would not have been written. I would have had to consider closing my research lab, at least temporarily.

Besides retaining staff, the hiring and retention of staff increased the productivity of the recipient and their collaborators. A few of these examples include:

By partially covering the costs of a postdoc, the funds played a critical role in developing a new line of inquiry. Multiple research proposals and multiple collaborations came out of the Vilas-funded work. Two papers in high-impact journals are forthcoming.

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Because these two members of my small research team were able to focus on research we were able to publish two papers and write three proposals. One of those proposals has been funded and will allow me to continue my work in this area.

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The funds enabled me to hire a project assistant, as well as grad student support for analysis of quantitative data. Both of these helped me increase my productivity markedly and extend my work into a new arena.

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The funds allowed my lab to continue with normal operations during a very critical period of my research activities. I cannot state that I made significant progress in my

research during this period, however, the VLCP funds helped me avoid severe declines in my research productivity and disruptions to the projects of my collaborators.

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I was able to continue a project that was eventually funded; support for a lab technician allowed additional progress that continues. Without the support I feel I may very well have had to close my lab. Now I have 5 federally-funded grants.

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It is not an exaggeration to say that the funding saved my laboratory.

Besides maintaining research productivity, other recipients noted the value of the VLCP in terms of their specific work life and scholarship:

The funds that I received from the Vilas Grant were absolutely invaluable to me! It completely re-invigorated every aspect of my work life so that I continue to feel fully engaged in all aspects of what I do – teaching, research and service. Since “research” in the performing arts is considered to be our artistic activity, quite a few positive outcomes have occurred.

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I think the only other thing I would like to stress is that the grant didn’t just help with my research. It really was the catalyst to an entirely new and re-invigorated approach to every aspect of my work life (and personal life, frankly). I feel like a new and better person as a result of this grant.

### **Publicity about the VLCP Program**

Many of the recipients encouraged departments to do a better job in sharing information about the VLCP. Not only did the grantees encourage their Chairs to publicize this, but the grantees have encouraged others to apply.

I think it would be an excellent idea for Chairs of Departments to encourage their faculty to apply. It is important that the faculty member be willing to recognize their need for help during times like this and to be communicating about the difficulties they are carrying. No one can do that for them.

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I have acknowledged the support of the VLCP program in lectures (included on the final slide) without going into details or specifics. I have discussed it privately with colleagues, letting them know how much it helped me in time of dire need. I anticipate being a more active promoter of the program after more time has lapsed since this very stressful event.

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My departmental colleagues were very supportive of me during that difficult time, and the grant was well received. I have told a junior colleague about the grant, as she's experienced some familial and health challenges and could stand to benefit.

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I told a faculty member in another department about this opportunity and shared my application. She also applied and received the funding. This makes a positive impact on her research.

At the same time, many of the recipients felt uncomfortable about the personal issues or events they faced. They often felt embarrassed and used the word "stigma" to describe it. They appreciated the confidentiality of the process.

I haven't really told others about the grant, since no-one asked specifically. My department chair knew about the grant, but that was about it. Even though I knew I shouldn't be, part of me was a bit embarrassed that I needed to ask for funding help. So I didn't really broadcast to others when I received the funding.

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Despite the tremendous benefit I have received from this grant I have not talked to others about it. I guess I don't know people well enough at the university to suggest it. I certainly haven't mentioned that I received it. I feel some stigma associated with these life events and have not felt comfortable sharing them.

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This program is extremely helpful and valuable, and very much needed. I also appreciated that my description of need was confidential, and that I didn't have to share it with my senior colleagues.

Ultimately however, they recognized the value of the program, as reflected in the comments listed above and in the following:

I think you can tell how valuable I feel this grant is. While I have been enormously grateful for all of the support I have received from the Graduate School (love the summer salary support!), this particular grant was crucial in terms of timing and the special nature of its focus made it particularly valuable to me.

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I can't think of a better way to help than to continue the VLCP program. The single biggest barrier to success in research is the difficulty of maintaining funding. Even a small amount of support can maintain some continuity. It is very hard to recover from a complete gap in funding.

### **Administration of Grant Program**

Once again, the recipients had no concerns or issues with the administration of this grant program. In particular, they identified Jenn Sheridan as critical to the process and appreciated how well she handled the sensitive nature of their issues.

The entire process was extremely simple and well-organized. There was a minimum of paperwork and bureaucracy. I particularly valued the help and support that the program staff gave me as I was going through that difficult period in my life. I also appreciated the anonymity afforded by the process.

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Very supportive and professional. I have never felt so institutionally supported before.

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The application, notification and administration process was a positive experience. Jenn Sheridan was very helpful.

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Also, I need to give special mention to Jenn Sheridan, who was tremendously helpful. I did not receive funding with my first application, which I submitted when my son was sick. Jenn encouraged me to apply again after I shared the series of events that hit me later in the year. Throughout the application and grant cycle, she was thoughtful, encouraging and adaptive. She is an outstanding part of this program.