

## 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 2018/19 academic year marks the 14<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 \$600,000 for the program in 2018/19. \$211,391 was carried over from 2017/18, leaving \$388,609 in new funding for this 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 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. New this year, some limited summer salary is now allowable for faculty.

### Review Panel

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

- **Jennifer Sheridan.** A Senior Scientist, Permanent PI, and a sociologist by training, Dr. Sheridan represents the Social Sciences 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.
- **Jim Escalante.** Prof. Escalante is a professor of Art, and represents the Arts & Humanities Division. Prof. Escalante is retiring in Spring 2019.
- **Nicole Perna.** Dr. Perna is a Professor of Genetics, and represents the Biological Sciences Division.

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

### Applicants and Awards

We have established multiple deadlines for VLCP applications throughout the year, in order to increase the flexibility of the program for faculty in crisis. In 2018/19, we offered three rounds of funding.

- **Round 1.** Deadline May 25, 2018. Applications received: 12. Total amount requested: \$373,371. Applications funded: 8. Total amount awarded: \$238,240 (\$7,880 of this sum will be spent in the 2019/20 academic year.)
- **Round 2.** Deadline October 16, 2018. Applications received: 4. Total amount requested: \$158,480. Applications funded: 3. Total amount awarded: \$105,928 (\$35,641 of this sum will be spent in the 2019/20 academic year.)
- **Round 3.** Deadline December 28, 2018. Applications received: 4. Total amount requested: \$158,758. Applications funded: 4. Total amount awarded: \$159,716 (\$125,635 of this sum will be spent in the 2019/20 academic year.)

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| • <b>SUMMARY, 2018/19:</b> Applications received: 20. Total amount requested: \$690,609. Applications funded: 15. Total amount awarded: \$503,884 (\$169,156 of this sum will be spent in the 2019/20 academic year.) |
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### Recipient Demographics

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants are very diverse:

|                                   | <b>Applicants</b> | <b>Recipients</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                     |                   |                   |
| Female                            | 12                | 9                 |
| Male                              | 8                 | 6                 |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b> |                   |                   |
| Faculty of Color                  | 2                 | 0                 |
| Majority Faculty                  | 18                | 15                |
| <b>Title</b>                      |                   |                   |
| Assistant Professor               | 4                 | 3                 |
| Associate Professor               | 5                 | 5                 |
| Professor                         | 10                | 6                 |
| Permanent PI/Academic Staff*      | 1                 | 1                 |
| <b>Division</b>                   |                   |                   |
| Biological Sciences               | 9                 | 6                 |
| Physical Sciences                 | 3                 | 3                 |
| Social Sciences                   | 4                 | 4                 |
| Arts & Humanities                 | 4                 | 2                 |

<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.

\* Approximately 50 academic staff members have Permanent PI status. A divisional affiliation was assigned to them based on their research and administrative home (e.g., a Permanent PI in the SMPH is assigned the “Biological Sciences” division.)

### Issues Arising in 2018/19

Once again, we did not spend our entire allotment. We received many fewer applications than we have in the past, especially in the December round. The addition of summer salary to this award has been marvelous; many faculty have taken advantage of this new possibility and are grateful to the Vilas Trust for allowing summer research salary.

For the upcoming 2019/20 award year, we will replace Jim Escalante on the review committee with Prof. Tom Dubois (German, Nordic & Slavic Languages), representing the Arts & Humanities division.

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

The following outcomes were provided by the recipients who received the VLCP. There were very few recipients this year, which is reflected in the length of this section. Despite the small numbers however, their productivity levels were at an all-time high (see Section III).

VLCP recipients applied for the grant for reasons similar to those described in the past. In particular, they were dealing with the illness or death of a loved one, the adoption or birth of a child with complications, and/or their own illnesses or individual challenges. These issues, along with the unfortunate timing of these events, significantly affected their ability to progress in their scholarship and careers. Generally, the group was comprised of faculty at the two ends of the career spectrum. Some were recently hired at UW-Madison and new to campus; others were full professors and considering retirement in the near future.

About half of the recipients had considered leaving the university due to the crisis, which is a similar finding to previous years’ reports. One recipient noted, “The life events did put me at risk for leaving UW-Madison. I would not have been able to stay or make progress without the assistance.” The other recipients stated they were too close to retirement to consider leaving, or were just recently hired. In either case, they all noted that the grant played a significant role and that it gave them the “option to stay.” One recipient noted that the event had the potential to hurt her career progression, but feels motivated to stay due to it:

*The risk was in not getting tenure, or potentially in being so exhausted that I just quit, which I did think about quite a bit. The funds helps to feel valued and supported at UW-Madison, which has contributed to being more motivated to stay.*

Another recipient noted the value for people early in their career:

*I think the greatest value is for younger/newer faculty to mitigate effects of life events that are disruptive at critical points in the process of getting established (especially progression toward tenure).*

The majority of participants used the funds to hire graduate students or postdoctoral researchers to step in for them and run their labs, to collect and analyze data, and/or to provide the recipient with the time needed to address and get through their personal crises. These postdocs and grad students were provided with a year of funding and also were afforded the opportunity to increase their scholarship and research. Furthermore, they wrote grant proposals that ultimately led to a continuation of their positions, which was a secondary impact of the recipient receiving the grant. One recipient noted:

*The grant was also positive for the student that I hired. Because she could work on several of my projects, she has developed quite a record of scholarship. I was also able to take on several roles as Co-I on large grants, which allowed me to engage in collaborative work in a new way.*

Another recipient described a similar experience:

*The research that we carried out with my postdoc produced new interesting results that made a foundation for new grant proposal applications. These new grants were awarded later (in total I received 5 new grants from four different funding agencies). We also published five research articles during that period of time.*

The levels of productivity and scholarship were quite high with this cohort of recipients. Some used it to “jump start” their research program:

*I appreciate that this program focuses on helping faculty re-engage with research; it is not competitive in the traditional sense (for example, with WARF grants, you must show productivity, et al). This program fills a particular niche that I have not encountered with any other program.*

Another noted:

*The Vilas Life Cycle Professorship is simply incredible. Knowing that this resource is available helps those going through a major life event – many other grants/awards are competitive. If your research stalls due to a life event, you are worried that you will fall further behind. This program enables us to reinvigorate our research and gain some energy to move forward. Additionally, having WISELI programs, seminars, events (I've benefitted from programs for women faculty, for example), is helpful in reframing the discourse around how major life events can impact academic careers. Training administrators and department leaders to be sensitive and work with faculty and staff who are facing challenging situations is crucial. I am most grateful that my chair was willing to work with me and empower me to re-engage in all aspects of my work.*

A third recipient identified the many ways that she benefitted:

*The Vilas Life Cycle Professorship enabled me to have a year of support where I could complete projects I hadn't gotten done over my sabbatical... and so much more, as I have attested to here. I am confident that I would not have been able to design two*

*special topics courses, conduct three research projects, and publish several chapters and articles within one year if it weren't for my Vilas Life Cycle PAs, who were like angels to me. I am so very grateful for the Vilas Life Cycle grant, and I can't thank you enough. The work completed that year continues on today.*

Similar to previous years' evaluations, the VLCP is considered to be one of the most, if not THE most valuable program on campus, according to the recipients:

*This is probably the most valuable program on campus for which I have been involved. The flexibility is really key and just the idea that the program communicates, as well.*

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*At the university level, I think preserving this program and allocating funds for VLCP is crucially important. I was not able to apply at one of the cycles as funds were not available since funding was already committed to the support of previous applications. I sincerely hope that my example can advocate for prioritizing VLCP to avoid funding lapses even though it may appear counterintuitive for people to think that a faculty member can be productive and impactful when going through some kind of personal crisis...For me VLCP and WARF Fall Competition are at the top of the list in terms of importance and impact. These are unique programs that do a lot of good for this University.*

Finally, all noted the ease of applying for the grant and the overall administration of it, especially highlighting Jennifer Sheridan's role in it:

*The process was seamless and very easy! Jennifer was great throughout the process and deserves a lot of commendations for her great work.*

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*Jenn Sheridan was a pleasure to work with; she was/is incredibly responsive and helpful throughout all aspects of the process. I have recommended this to other colleagues and am most grateful for the support.*

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### **Section III: Research, Scholarship and Productivity**

This final section describes the recipients' research and the scholarship that they directly attribute to the time and funds of their VLCP award. It has been removed for confidentiality reasons.