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
Section II: Experiences and Outcomes of VLCP Recipients
Section III: Scholarship Progress and Highlights

Section I: Administrative Details
In 2020/21, the Vilas Trust was unable to fund the program due to the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Fortunately, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education (OVCRGE) was able to provide funding, allowing us to offer a 16th year of the program. We named it the “Life Cycle Grants” program for 2020/21, to reflect this change of funding for one year.

The Life Cycle Grant program is administered by the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI), as authorized by the Office of the Provost and for 2020/21 in collaboration with the OVCRGE. The OVCRGE awarded $500,000 for the program in 2020/21. Carryovers from the 2019/20 fiscal year were covered by the campus.

All faculty and permanent principal investigators, regardless of divisional affiliation, are eligible for these funds. Per the stipulations of the Estate, individual awards are not to exceed $40,000. In addition, all awardees are vetted with the Office of the Provost prior to evaluating applications, in order to ensure that each potential 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.** 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 VCLP 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. She currently serves as the Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Physical Sciences in the OVCRGE.
- **Thomas DuBois.** Dr. DuBois is professor and chair of the German, Nordic, and Slavic department, and represents the Arts & Humanities Division.

1 To maintain anonymity of the recipients, the public will have access to Sections I and II only.
• **Nicole Perna.** Dr. Perna is a Professor of Genetics, and represents the Biological Sciences Division.

**Applicants and Awards**

We have established multiple deadlines for Life Cycle applications throughout the year, in order to increase the flexibility of the program for faculty in crisis. In 2020/21, we offered two rounds of funding.


• **Round 2.** Deadline December 31, 2020. Applications received: 17. Total amount requested: $652,140. Applications funded: 9. Total amount awarded: $276,179 ($111,176 of this sum will be spent in the 2021/22 academic year.)

- **SUMMARY, 2020/21:** Applications received: 29. Total amount requested: $1,121,639. Applications funded: 18. Total amount awarded: $611,176 ($111,176 of this sum will be spent in the 2021/22 academic year.)

**Recipient Demographics**

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants are very diverse (only 27 applicants are tracked because two were reapplications):

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<tr>
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<th>Applicants</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
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2 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 would be 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 2020/21
The Vilas Trust was unable to fund this program for 2020/21, and we were fortunate that the OVCRGE was able to provide funds for two rounds. We saw many pandemic-related applications, and anticipate that more will arise in 2021/22.

The Provost’s Office requested that the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program be moved to “Part A” of the Vilas Trust proffer, and we are thrilled to know that this was accepted. If the Trust has enough money in a given year, we can be assured that this program will have high priority for funding.

Section II: Experiences and Outcomes of VLCP Recipients

The experiences and outcomes of this group of awardees mirror the positive consequences described by recipients in previous annual reports. Ten faculty and staff who received funds in 2019-2020 responded to a request for information about the use of the funds and how they were supported during a challenging time in their professional and personal lives.

For four of the awardees, their health and other issues related to their personal lives were factors in applying for the grant. The other six applicants were faced with debilitating illnesses of their family members and for some, the untimely death of individuals. They had significant caretaking responsibilities along with professional obligations that impeded their ability to maintain their work. Of the ten, one left UW-Madison; four considered leaving but chose to stay and were supported financially and psychologically by the VLCP funds. Five did not consider leaving but for one, who did not get tenure, they will leave. The other four thought about taking a leave of absence or adjusting their lives to accommodate the disruption.

Two recipients noted:

*The funding helped me stay at UW Madison. Without funds to cover my salary I would not have been able to continue here for much longer.*

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*I was considering moving to another university to take an administrative position. VLCP tipped the balance to me staying at UW and rebooting my research work.*

The awardees described a number of positive outcomes that they attribute to the VLCP funds. Specific details about scholarship, such as grants and publications, are found in Section III. Their comments, however, provide qualitative examples:

*The grant was instrumental to my work over the summer of 2019, which gave me significant momentum into that fall. I was able, for instance, to sign a book contract; win*
an NSF grant; and significantly revise articles in progress, all thanks in part to the support of these funds.

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The funds helped me in getting my research work back on track. An alternative to the 1 month of summer support would have been to teach our summer course, which is an all-consuming activity for 5+ weeks. Instead I was able to do research work, which included preparing a journal manuscript revision for publication. Activity on my research projects has subsequently continued and they are on a trajectory of ongoing progress.

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The grant funding allowed me to get some much needed preliminary data and I was able to get a ROI funded last year.

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VLCP funds made a major difference. Most notably, VLCP funds allowed me to travel to give talks to donors (and land a modest grant that has since yielded a high profile publication). It also allowed me to travel to my long-term field site in [NAME] (still working on publication related to that project).

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I published a high-profile paper that simply would not have happened without this grant. This has opened up invitations for more collaborations and for presentations at other universities.

Similar to previous years’ recipients, besides supporting their own research and time, an additional seven graduate students were supported by the VLCP. They helped with research and other scholarship activities; three finished their PhDs and moved into their own post doc or faculty positions. Many helped in grant applications and in publications that will continue to serve them professionally into the future.

The awardees commented on this:

Due to this life event, my research had been delayed for several months. The funding allowed me to hire a RA to help with survey design, distribution and analysis. It also paid my summer salary, which was very important to be able to complete the research preparation for data collection the following fall.

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I supported one of my advisees who helped me with a project (manuscript in prep) and finished her PhD and landed a job as tenure track faculty (Without VLCP, her PhD would have been delayed to AY 20-21. In hindsight this would have been terrible since most hiring stopped during COVID.)

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The funds enabled me to support one graduate student during a critical time. She has now completed her degree and has one paper in publication and another in review. They were extremely important to the continuation of my research and ability to (successfully) compete for federal funding.
The grant was also very important for my RA who was working on her doctoral dissertation and had recently had a baby. This grant allowed her to work from home and spend more time with her baby.

The recipients acknowledged the demands of working at UW and provided a few examples of the ways that the university could better support people who are dealing with major life events:

Overall, I think UW is a rather demanding workplace with little flexibility when major life events occur. Most grants, such a buyout from teaching, require a lot of work and planning ahead. Grants like VLCP that have a rather simple application process, are especially important when sudden life events occur.

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Provide funds, exactly like this. A reduction in teaching and/or service loads would also be helpful.

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In retrospect, much more [could have been] done. It would have been manageable to reduce my course load over the period from more than double the department average down to the average of about one course per semester. I understand that granting a leave with pay may not be possible, but especially during the final months when caregiving was especially difficult I really could have used reduced duties. Unlike research work, course duties are completely inflexible both in magnitude of work required and in scheduling.

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More of what it is doing, and more proactively: making it clear that major life events are in fact major, and that there are multiple support structures from the department level on up to draw on.

Finally, when compared to other programs on campus, the recipients ranked the VLCP highly:

This is an incredibly high value program. It gives support directly to faculty who need it when they need it. It was critical in my development.

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Extremely important. I helped me tremendously to deliver my survey on time and kept my community partners active and interested. I’m certain that further delays would have negatively impacted the study and the partnerships.

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It is quite valuable. I think it should not be regarded as an optional nicety. It should be available in larger scale (funded I don’t know how), and should extend to buy-out of at least partial duties during semesters.

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I’m not sure what the “other programs” include but this one is EXTREMELY valuable.
Finally, none of the recipients indicated any negative outcomes from the grant. They also voiced some concerns about talking about it:

Yes, I have told others about what a critical and necessary help this grant was when I was really ill. It helped me obtain more data, and keep my student funded. I would describe it as a lifeline, that I needed. It’s interesting, I was told that I did not need to list this grant on my tenure dossier, because it would be an indicator that I had struggled with something. I have [NAME] disease, which made me really ill, and I am fairly transparent about it if people ask. I told my mentor committee that I wanted to list it, so that it was a clear indicator that I had struggled with something, and to show how much I have accomplished despite the struggle.

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I have not had the opportunity to tell other people about this grant but I definitely will if I hear of someone in need for a grant of this type. I had a wonderful experience with Jennifer Sheridan who handled the grant. She was very understanding and supportive and explained the process well. Based on this experience, I would describe the grant based on ‘human understanding and caring.’ I don’t know any other grant recipients but the colleague who told me about it described it in a similar way. I don’t know if my departments know of this grant or how they would perceive it but I’m sure it would be described very positively.

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.